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INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY 0065
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 002157

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DEPT FOR AF/SPG
NSC FOR COURVILLE AND SHORTLEY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/06/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [KPAO](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [KCRM](#) [KISL](#) [SU](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: KHARTOUM: PRO-NCP, PRO-IRANIAN JOURNALIST BEHEADED

Classified By: P/E CHIEF E. WHITAKER, REASON: SECTION 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) The body of "Al Wafaq" Editor-in-Chief Mohammed Taha Mohammed Ahmed was found beheaded September 6 in the Kalakla area south of Khartoum, after he was abducted from his home in North Khartoum the previous night. Murders of this type are unknown in Sudan, and the shock was signaled by front-page coverage in the major newspapers. The murder typifies the fractious currents of National Congress Party (NCP) policies, public unrest, and Islamism present in the country.

¶2. (C) The motive for the murder is unconfirmed, though police arrested an undisclosed number of suspects on September 6. Minister of Interior Al-Zubair Bashir Taha (no relation) blamed "foreign elements" for the crime. A contact within the police department said that some of the suspects were Sunni extremists linked to Al Qaeda in Iraq, who objected to Taha's pro-Shiite and pro-Iranian positions as well as some of his previous writings on Islam. (Note: In January 2006, 20 unknown assailants bearing knives attacked the "Al Wafaq" offices with Molotov cocktails, the investigation of which is still pending. End note.) A more salacious rumor is circulating Khartoum that Senior Assistant to the President and SLM leader Minni Minawi ordered Taha's assassination because of a recent article by Taha that chastised Minawi's Zaghawa tribe for demanding more power in Darfur than its numbers justified. (Comment: Post has no reason to believe this allegation. End comment.)

¶3. (C) Taha had close ties to the NCP through Vice President Ali Osman Taha and Assistant to the President Nafie Ali Nafie, both of whom have long-standing links to the Iranian security services. "Al Wafaq" shares its name with an Iranian newspaper, receives funding from Tehran, supports the NCP, and advances anti-American and anti-Western opinions. Taha had been a student activist for the NCP's precursor, the National Islamic Front (NIF), in the late 1980s and sided with President Omer Al Bashir following his split with Hassan Turabi in 2000. In 2005, one of Taha's articles was criticized by religious conservatives as disrespectful to the Prophet Mohammed, and "Al Wafaq" was closed for three months. Taha spent two weeks in prison before being acquitted. Abdel Hayie Yousif, a well-known Muslim scholar, later declared Taha an infidel after the publication of another article on the Prophet Mohammed's mother.

¶4. (C) Taha was dragged from his doorstep into a car at 2200 hours on September 5 in full view of a police watch stand and then driven at 120 km/hour across Khartoum, passing three police stations on route. Contacts questioned the police's ability to maintain law and order given the audacity of the

crime and suggested that law enforcement has devoted all of its resources to maintain regime stability in the face of recent protests and mounting international pressure on Darfur. The apparent police negligence also led some to question if the authorities colluded with the killers.

15. (U) The independent daily "Al Sudani" wrote on September 7 that "this (the murder) is an indication of the alarming social deterioration that our country has now reached in light of the policies of defiance and confrontation that the government and the ruling National Congress adopt." Similarly, the independent "Khartoum Monitor" reported that "blaming it (the murder) on radical Islamists is not convincing...The answer and ultimate responsibility lies with the National Congress government. It is the government that said Khartoum is safe for everybody, a claim that is now obviously far from true."

HUME